



PANHANDLE

BENEWAH, BONNER, BOUNDARY, KOOTENAI, & SHOSHONE COUNTIES

EMPLOYMENT NEWS

For workers in the Panhandle, February generally is the worst month of the year. This February was a stunning exception, especially in Kootenai County. The opening of a Verizon directory assistance center in Coeur d'Alene, the opening of the Northpoint Financial Group center in Smelterville, the reopening of the Center Partners call center in Coeur d'Alene that had closed at the end of December, and the hiring for a Costco store scheduled to open in April created 575 new job openings. In addition to the unexpected bounty of job openings, fewer people were laid off between January and February than normal. Weather conditions gave loggers, construction workers, and ski resort employees what they wished for—great snow on the mountains, but fairly warm, dry conditions at lower elevations. The net result of many more openings and fewer layoffs than normally occur in February was to push the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate from 7.0 percent in January to 6.8 percent in February.

Although the unusual conditions persisted into March, it is not likely that the unemployment rate will remain so low in the next few months. And even though the economy has picked up, many Panhandle residents remain unemployed. Unadjusted labor force statistics show 9.4 percent of the Panhandle's labor force was unemployed in February when 8,640 residents were unemployed and actively seeking work. In addition, many of the Panhandle residents who found employment between February 2003 and February 2004 regard their current work as a temporary stopgap. In many cases, they are working fewer hours or at jobs for which they are vastly overqualified. Even if they are working only a few hours a month for pay or profit, people are counted as *employed* even if they still consider themselves *unemployed*.

It's not that economic conditions haven't improved during the last 12 months. They have improved enough to bring the Panhandle's labor market back to normal. Relatively high unemployment is the norm for the Panhandle because of the constant movement of population into the Panhandle, and the high rate of unem-

Panhandle Table 1: Labor Force & Employment

	Feb 2004*	Jan 2004	Feb 2003	% Change From	
				Last Month	Last Year
INDIVIDUALS BY PLACE OF RESIDENCE					
Seasonally Adjusted					
Civilian Labor Force	93,320	92,160	91,710	1.3	1.8
Unemployed	6,350	6,430	7,150	-1.2	-11.2
% of Labor Force Unemployed	6.8	7.0	7.8		
Total Employment	86,970	85,730	84,560	1.4	2.9
Unadjusted					
Civilian Labor Force	92,020	91,360	90,500	0.7	1.7
Unemployed	8,640	8,390	9,470	3.0	-8.8
% of Labor Force Unemployed	9.4	9.2	10.5		
Total Employment	83,380	82,970	81,030	0.5	2.9
JOBS BY PLACE OF WORK					
Nonfarm Payroll Jobs** - NAICS	67,270	67,000	65,950	0.4	2.0
Goods-Producing Industries	12,530	12,730	12,210	-1.6	2.6
Natural Resources & Mining	1,350	1,400	1,320	-3.6	2.3
Construction	4,090	4,250	3,770	-3.8	8.5
Manufacturing	7,090	7,080	7,120	0.1	-0.4
Wood Product Manufacturing	2,660	2,650	2,880	0.4	-7.6
Other Manufacturing	4,430	4,430	4,240	0.0	4.5
Service-Providing Industries	54,740	54,270	53,740	0.9	1.9
Trade, Transportation, & Utilities	13,180	13,350	13,000	-1.3	1.4
Wholesale Trade	1,300	1,330	1,310	-2.3	-0.8
Retail Trade	10,050	10,200	9,950	-1.5	1.0
Utilities	390	390	380	0.0	2.6
Transportation & Warehousing	1,440	1,430	1,360	0.7	5.9
Information	1,170	1,110	1,100	5.4	6.4
Financial Activities	2,910	2,860	2,780	1.7	4.7
Professional & Business Services	5,930	5,890	6,210	0.7	-4.5
Educational & Health Services	6,850	6,740	6,610	1.6	3.6
Leisure & Hospitality	7,740	7,620	7,400	1.6	4.6
Other Services	2,170	2,110	2,170	2.8	0.0
Government Education	5,300	5,090	5,170	4.1	2.5
Government Administration	8,290	8,300	8,170	-0.1	1.5
Government Tribes	1,200	1,200	1,130	0.0	6.2

* Preliminary estimate

**Full- or part-time jobs of people who worked for or received wages in the pay period including the 12th of the month

ployment is normal in the winter and spring months due to the strong seasonality of the local economy. Census population estimates, Job Service records, driver's license data, school enrollments, and other sources all show that people are continuing to move to the area in large numbers. The net result is that the job market hasn't improved quite as much as the February seasonally adjusted unemployment rate suggests. For employers in most industries, that means labor continues to be available at relatively low wage rates.

AREA DEVELOPMENTS

Bonner County

- Some time this year, Riley Creek Lumber will close the Sandpoint lumber finishing plant it purchased from Louisiana-Pacific (L-P) last fall and move the 70 jobs 40 minutes away to its Chilco sawmill along Highway 95 near Athol. The Chilco sawmill, also previously owned by L-P, currently employs 80 people. The consolidation of the operations will reduce costs.

Originally the Sandpoint plant, which includes a planer, served three L-P mills. Chilco is the only remaining mill using the finishing plant. Sandpoint workers will have the option of transferring to Chilco or applying for openings at the Moyie Springs mill in Boundary County or the Laclede mill in Bonner County. The Sandpoint plant's location is likely to be of great interest to other businesses because it includes 26 acres near the Sandpoint airport, Highway 95, and rail access.

- Clark Fork businessman Tom Williams has big dreams for Clark Fork, a city of 560 residents near the Montana border. On March 19, Williams, the executive director of the Clark Fork Economic Development Corporation (CFEDC), hosted a public meeting at a site where he is developing a business incubator for artisans that eventually may encompass 17 buildings and employ 60 people. Currently, the site contains two buildings—the Lone Wolf Trading Post and the temporary headquarters for CFEDC. The site's theme is old West mining town. Williams plans to create a place where local artisans and crafters can make and sell their wares, and tourists can come watch them work as well as buy their wares.
- Ponderay, a city of 670 residents immediately north of Sandpoint, bills itself as "the little city with the big future." More than 1,500 people work in the city, which is home to eight manufacturing businesses and a retail area centered on the Bonner Mall—the largest shopping center in Bonner County. Ponderay recently earned its Idaho Gem Community certification after making an extensive community development plan with assistance from the Idaho Department of Commerce. It also established the Ponderay Community Development Corporation to help make its development plans become reality. On August 28, it will celebrate Ponderay Day.

Kootenai County

- Coeur d'Alene moviegoers are looking forward to the completion of a 14-screen cinema that just broke ground at the Riverstone development between Northwest Boulevard and the Spokane River. The cinema is slated for completion in early 2005 and will be operated by the national Regal Cinema chain. The cinema will anchor a nine-building entertainment, retail, and restaurant complex.
- Riverstone developer John Stone recently purchased 77 acres from Central Pre-Mix, bringing the total area of the Riverstone development to 150 acres. Riverstone already is home to several commercial office buildings, and it soon will begin to market residential waterfront lots and the 331 condominium units it plans to build there.
- Kimmel Corporation, a six-year-old company at 1677 East Miles Avenue in Hayden Lake, makes TitleSearch, a software package that helps title insurance companies quickly detect liens and easements on building titles. It currently is hiring 15 workers, bringing its total employment up to 50 workers.
- Jobs Plus, Kootenai County's nonprofit economic development organization, recently convinced All Wall

Contracting to move from the Spokane Valley to the Idaho side of the border. The company recently moved to Riverbend Commerce Park in Post Falls where it will enjoy large savings on workers' compensation, unemployment insurance, business liability insurance, and labor costs. The metal framing, drywall, and painting contractor employs 120 employees. All Wall's current projects include new buildings for Coeur d'Alene's alternative high school, Shoshone Medical Center, and Bonners Ferry High School.

Shoshone County

- While still enjoying a great ski season, Silver Mountain Resort in Kellogg broke ground on its 64-unit Morning Star Lodge condominiums in late March. Within a week, all the condo units were sold. The first building should be completed before the beginning of the next ski season. The second building will be completed about two months later. The condo buildings will be the first phase of the resort's long-term expansion plans that include the creation of a retail village, the addition of ski terrain, and the development of a golf course near the gondola base in Kellogg. The retail village near the gondola base will include 10,000-square feet of space for shops, professional offices, and skier services. Recent praise for Silver Mountain in ski magazines has greatly increased interest in the resort and its ski hill, which is served by the world's longest gondola. Residents of the Silver Valley are thrilled by the growing interest in the valley shown by skiers, trail buffs, retirees, and housing speculators.
- Dave Smith Motors, the automotive dealership that is Shoshone County's largest employer, hired 15 new sales people in March, bringing its employment close to 300 people. In April, the dealership broke ground on a new nine-bay detail shop next to its current parts and service department on Cameron Avenue in Kellogg. When the shop opens, the dealership will hire five new employees. Next to the new detail shop, a two-story building soon will be under construction. The new building will hold a GM showroom, a customer service lounge, a parts department, and more sales office space. The dealership plans to reconstruct the former Sunnyside Elementary School Building into an eatery serving healthy food for its employees and the public. It also is putting in a Mopar Speed Shop—a Chrysler parts showroom specializing in performance parts. In 2003, the dealership sold 7,000 new and 3,000 used vehicles; it was the number one Dodge Dealer in the world, the number one Chrysler dealer in the world, and the number one GM dealer in the Northwest. Many times a week, it shuttles potential vehicle purchasers, who love its one-price system, from the Spokane Airport 77 miles to Kellogg. It likely draws more than 20,000 people a year to Kellogg just to buy cars and trucks.

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